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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000956

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SUBJECT: MOZAMBIQUE--DISPARATE VIEWS ON MUGABE

REF: STATE 109638

Classified By: CDA Todd Chapman, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: President Guebuza's Chief of Staff Antonio Sumbana told Charge of private GRM concerns about the ongoing political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, but that the GRM saw little benefit in publicly challenging Robert Mugabe. "Zimbabwe still has the potential to destabilize Mozambique, both physically and psychologically," he said. Veteran Frelimo politician Marecelino dos Santos supported Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and his right to participate in the December European Union-African Union (EU/AU) summit. Despite holding no official government position, dos Santos is extremely influential within the party. Foreign Minister Alcida Abreu issued a similar defense of Mugabe in late June. Given the GRM's sensitivities to upsetting a potential regional troublemaker, look for Guebuza to play a supportive rather than a leading role at the upcoming SADC leaders meeting. END SUMMARY.

THE OFFICIAL VIEW--IN PRIVATE

¶2. (C) The Charge met August 8 with Antonio Sumbana, President Guebuza's Chief of Staff, to review deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe and present points in Reftel. Sumbana stated that the GRM was very concerned by the political crisis in Zimbabwe and for years had encouraged Mugabe to make political reforms. Representatives from ZANU-PF frequently came to Mozambique, he claimed, to complain about Mugabe and his negative impact on the country.

¶3. (C) Sumbana continued, however, that the GRM would not publicly criticize Mugabe because he acts like a caged animal when cornered. "Zimbabwe still has the potential to destabilize Mozambique, both physically and psychologically." The Chief of Staff noted that Mugabe could disrupt energy flows, commerce, and border migration between their two countries, all which would hurt Mozambique. He elaborated that Mugabe could destabilize Mozambique psychologically by raising fears along the border and creating a negative political environment. Sumbana made it clear that the GRM saw little benefit in publicly challenging Mugabe, though in private the GRM would support an organized political transition.

¶4. (C) For these reasons the GRM believed it imperative that SADC approach the Mugabe problem as a block, so as not to imperil any one country. Acknowledging that the Mbeki-led efforts had not met with serious engagement by the Zimbabwean Government, Sumbana said that new ideas were to be discussed at the August 16 leaders meeting, though he did not elaborate. Sumbana particularly appreciated the USG position that we recognized the importance of an African solution to

this regional problem. He welcomed the offer of discrete support for a SADC initiative but identified no specific way in which the USG could assist at this time.

THE UNOFFICIAL VIEW---IN PUBLIC

¶ 15. (U) Marcelino dos Santos, one of the most powerful members of the Frelimo inner circle, said on July 30 at a conference in Portugal that it was "unthinkable" that the African Union would accept the notion that Mugabe be prevented from participating in the UE/AU summit in December. Dos Santos equated this with a colonial mentality and said that Africa and Europe should be on equal footing whereby no restrictions are imposed on the participation of any African or European Head of State.

¶ 16. (U) While his outspoken manner has sometimes been controversial, dos Santos's influence has been pronounced during the Guebuza administration. Although not a member of an official government body, dos Santos has made public statements on important and controversial topic such as labor law and the privatization of the national airline that are normally reserved for government officials.

¶ 17. (U) Dos Santos' comments run counter to the official GRM policy of "quiet diplomacy" in relation to the Zimbabwean crisis. Analysts and the local press have criticized the GRM's approach, noting that Mozambique has considerable leverage over Zimbabwe, particularly due to Mugabe's history in Mozambique and because of the critical trade link provided by the port of Beira. However, dos Santos is not the first influential FRELIMO politician to come to Mugabe's defense.

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On June 22, Foreign Affairs Minister Alcida Abreu expressed similar support for Mugabe's participation at the EU/AU summit, despite EU sanctions barring his travel abroad, but we have seen not further public statements from her on the matter.

COMMENT: GRM TO TAKE A SUPPORTING ROLE AT SADC

¶ 18. (C) Mugabe has always been a cherished figure for the FRELIMO old guard, who view him as a kindred spirit in the struggles for independence more than three decades ago. FM Abreu's and dos Santos' comments taken together suggest that significant underlying support for Mugabe remains, though the President's Chief of Staff clearly recognized a need for change in the neighborhood. Given the GRM's sensitivities to upsetting a potential troublemaker, look for Guebuza to play a supportive rather than a leading role at the upcoming SADC leaders meeting. That said, it appears there will be few Mozambican regrets once Mugabe departs the regional political stage. End Comment.

Chapman